Walking into the Kingdom of God

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Good morning, my dear friends.
Today is August 6, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet of Plum Village. This morning in Hiroshima, a few hours ago, 30,000 people gathered in the Hiroshima Park. They meditated together. The Prime Minister of Japan was there this morning, and in his speech, he demanded that all atomic bombs be destroyed. Thirty thousand Japanese gathered today to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the first atomic bomb, the bomb that fell on Hiroshima exactly on the sixth of August. It was a small bomb, but it was a new kind of bomb that had the power of killing a lot of people. At that time in 1945, the United States of America was the only country that possessed atomic bombs. Japan and Germany were associated closely with each other. The first atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima killed 140,000 people right away. In less than 30 seconds, more than 140,000 people. Not many countries on earth have atomic bombs, but the bombs they have now are a thousand times more powerful. The atomic bombs of today can destroy a whole city of Paris, of New York. They can kill millions of people in just 20 seconds. The little bomb in Hiroshima only killed 140,000 people, but after that, the Japanese who were in Hiroshima, if they did not die right away, continued to die until several decades later. I was there. I met with these people who were dying, several years after the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima. On the eighth of August, two days later, another bomb was dropped in Nagasaki and the destruction was equivalent and Japan surrendered. If you visit the Hiroshima Park today, you will come to a place where there is a little arch and inside, if you look carefully, you will see an inscription in Japanese. The inscription said, "Please lie still. We shall not do it again. Please be still there. We promise that we will not do it again." We promised not to do it again, but we have manufactured so many other bombs and nuclear warheads. Now, not only the United States of America has them, but France has them, Great Britain, India, China and many other countries. We, mankind, have the power to destroy humanity, to destroy the earth. That is why the Prime Minister of Japan this morning called on all the other nations to abolish the nuclear bombs and warheads.

The Upper Hamlet, where we sit now, was also a site of fighting between the Germans and the French during that time. Several French Resistance members

were placed against the wall that is close to the Listening to the Rain Veranda and shot by German soldiers. The inhabitants of Thenac, including used to think about their village, which now includes the Upper Hamlet of Plum Village, with that kind of horror, sadness, anger, within them.

Plum Village was set up fifteen years ago. This year is the 15th anniversary of Plum Village. And during these fifteen years, we have practiced the walking meditation, touching the soil of the Upper Hamlet with love, concentration, understanding and reconciliation. Among us there are many German friends. The German people have come here to Plum Village. They did not bring any guns; in fact, they brought their hearts, and together, with French people, with Dutch people, with American people, with British people, with Vietnamese people, we have practiced walking meditation in the Upper Hamlet every day, every night.

We have kissed the earth of the Upper Hamlet, we have kissed the soil of the Upper Hamlet with our feet, mindfully. We want to print our peace, our compassion and our love on this piece of land. And there has been a great transformation here. The inhabitants of the village of Thenac have told us that they could feel that peace radiating from Plum Village, and now every time they think of Thenac, of the Upper Hamlet, they no longer have the feeling of horror, resentment and anger. Thanks to you all who come from more than twenty countries, who have come and practiced peace, practiced forgiveness, practiced reconciliation, Thenac has become a land of peace. And Thenac will continue to offer itself as a land of peace, a place where we can come together, hold each other's hand and walk together in peace. There are times when there are retreats when many hundreds of people gather and practice, but there are times when there are only permanent residents of Plum Village who are there to practice. We are about 100 people, but we do practice every day, every night. We do bring our peace and joy and reconciliation and compassion to the land of Thenac every day and every night.

In the last fifteen years, French people have come here to practice and also German people. They have come, they have taught each other, they have practiced sitting, walking, drinking tea together, beginning anew with each other. It is a very beautiful and meaningful act. Also, we have Japanese who have come all the way from Japan to practice here. There were times when we had more than twenty Japanese people practicing with us here. We had to have the dharma talk translated into Japanese. I myself had tea meditation with only Japanese practitioners in my hut.

Today we I have the privilege of having one Japanese citizen who is here. She was born in 1958, thirteen years after the Hiroshima war event. She had heard of it and she suffered also, like the rest of us. Today we have Americans with us--Americans who were born in 1943, '47, '48. It is wonderful that Japanese and Americans come to Plum Village and practice. Japan and America have been working together in many areas, especially economics. I don't know whether true reconciliation has been made, at a deeper level.

If we have learned from the lesson, then, Japanese and Americans will be able to keep the promise not to do it again, to themselves and to other people on earth. If Germans and French have learned that lesson, we should be able not to do it again to ourselves and to each other. Again, France and Germany are very closely associated in the enterprise of Europe, but deep inside, I don't know whether true reconciliation has been made. That is why today I beg all of you to look deeply, to go very deep to touch the wound that is still in there. To smile at it, to take each other's hand and we represent our people. The Japanese friend here will represent the Japanese people. The American who sits near to me, she will represent the American people. Both of you look deeply into the most profound level of your heart, touch the wounds, the wounds of your ancestors, your own wounds, and maybe the wounds of your children and their children, if you don't practice and heal the wound today. We shall ask the lady who represents Japan and the lady who represents America to do hugging meditation for us. All of us are Japanese; all of us are Americans, and we should be able to reconcile and heal the deep wounds in us.

I think I would like to invite one Vietnamese to come up, also, and do hugging meditation with one American. Vietnam and America have been destroying each other to a very deep level, although now there is an embassy of America in Hanoi, but that does not mean that we have been reconciled. The wound is still there very deep in the country and in the hearts of the people, both American and Vietnamese. So, we shall ask one Vietnamese person to do hugging meditation with one American person, touching deeply that wound and breathe in, breathe out deeply for all of us to heal the wounds. Then we will ask a French person representing the French people, and one German person representing the German people; they have been doing business with each other very well, but deep in their hearts, the wounds are still there.

I know of a person who survived a bomb dropped close to his house. He told me that he will never forgive the Germans. No matter what I taught him, he still cannot release his anger. I did not have a chance to be with him a lot, so I could not teach him and help him transform his hate. So this is an occasion for us to learn on this sixth of August, how to look deeply, how to embrace each other,

how to forgive each other. If we are not able to heal the wounds within us, we will transmit the wounds to future generations and they will continue to suffer like we have.

We shall ask the monks and the nuns to invoke the names of the Buddha and of the Bodhisattvas to pray for the 140,000 Japanese, to pray for all the French people and all the German people who were killed in the war, and to pray for millions of people who have died in the war in Vietnam, including children.

Now I would like you all to join your palms. I will light a stick of incense for the 140,000 Japanese who died in the bomb. And I will ask the sisters and the brothers to invoke the name of Shakyamuni Buddha, Avalokitesvara, Manjushri, and Samantabhadra. Let us listen to the bell.

[Bell]

[Thay leads chant paying homage to the bodhisattvas.]

[Bell]

Now, I would like to ask our Japanese sister and our American sister to come up here and practice hugging meditation. I will tell you how to do it. You join your palms. You breathe in and breathe out three times in order to be really there, and you open your arms. When you take the other person within your arms, you breathe in and you say, "In the name of the American people and nation," then you breathe out and you say, "We promise not to do it again." "In the name of the Japanese people, we promise not to do it again; we promise not to hold any anger." And we do that three times while everyone joins their palms and breathe in and breathe out and support them in their practice.

Breathing in, in the name of the American people, or the German People, or the Dutch people, or the Vietnamese people, because we are all responsible for what happened to some extent. When we breathe out, we say, "We promise never to do it again."

We have been learning about the six Paramitas. The Six Practices in order to cross over to the other shore, the shore of well being, the shore of non-fear, the shore of solidity, the shore of freedom. As we do not enjoy to be on this shore, the shore of anxiety and sorrow, anger, that is why we want to cross to the other shore. The teaching of the Six Paramitas have been presented to us as a means to cross to the other shore. We have learned about the practice of *Dana* Paramita, giving. We have learned about the practice of *Prajna* Paramita, understanding.

We have learned the practice of *Síla* Paramita, Mindfulness Training. We have learned the methods of *Dhayana* Paramita, the practice of meditation, of coming and looking deeply. And during this week we will learn about the last two Paramitas, namely, *ksanti* and *vira*.

Today I would like to begin with the practice of arriving. It can be said that the practice of Plum Village is the practice of arriving. Because we have been practicing running all the time, and we have not arrived. Coming to Plum Village you have to arrive. Otherwise we will run for all our life and their children will continue to run for all their lives, and several generations will continue to run and never find our true home. How to practice in order to arrive and to feel at home, that is the point. While you are in Plum Village, you are invited to practice the Bell of Mindfulness. Every time we hear the bell ringing, even the bell hanging on the Walnut tree or the one in the Medicine Hall or the Church bell nearby, we are invited to stop. To stop thinking, to stop talking, and to go back to our in-breath and our breath. All of us have been severed from our home. Unless you arrive, you cannot be happy, you cannot rest. Not only the Jewish people have been wandering around for many thousands of years, looking for a home, but all of us have been wandering for so many thousands of years looking for a place where we can feel completely at home. Many of us have not found it. A number of us in this community, a very few, have found it, and they have peace. They have happiness, they have solidity. So we can say that the practice in Plum Village is the practice of arriving. If you have not arrived, if you have been running a lot, if you have been very tired, it is time for you to try the practice of arriving. When you hear the bell, stop running. Because we continue to run in our daily life, even when we sleep. We run sometime not with our feet, but we run inside. You never get rest.

The Buddha said our mind is a monkey, monkey mind. Always on the move, never stopping. Monkey mind. Always searching, never finding. We have to know how to embrace the monkey and to teach it to rest. In Plum Village you are offered techniques, methods in order to embrace the monkey within, so you have the chance to arrive. When you hear the bell, you stop talking, you stop thinking, you stop doing the things you are doing, you break in and go back to yourself by means of your breathing. Your in breath is a vehicle. And you ride on that vehicle in order to go home. You listen intently to the sound of the bell, like the only sound in the world, like the voice of someone calling you deep, deep from within yourself. You most beloved one is calling you. Your mother, your father, your ancestors, the Buddha, Jesus, Moses. The voice of the most beloved one, the voice of home is calling you. And you just stop everything and listen to the bell, any kind of bell. Even if you don't have a bell, you listen to the sound of the telephone. It can be any bell.

In Plum Village every time we hear the telephone we practice the same; we stop talking, we stop thinking, we listen to the telephone and we go back to ourselves by the transportation of our in-breath. Then you pronounce the words within you, “I listen, I listen.” And you listen intently to the sound of the bell, like you listen to the voice of your most beloved one that you have lost trace for many thousands of years. Now he is calling, she is calling. In the Buddhist tradition they consider the sound of the bell the voice of the Buddha calling you back to your true home. That's why when you hear the bell, you breath in, listen, I am listening. When you breath out you say, “This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.” And you do that at least three times. If you like it, why don't you continue.

If you are a beginner, you may get irritated when you hear the sound of the bell, because the bell compels you to stop. You are telling your friend a very interesting story and suddenly the bell rings and it does not allow you to continue. In Plum Village you are supposed to stop, nothing is more important than the voice of your most beloved one calling you. If you are a beginner you may revolt against the bell. But if you practice well, in just two seconds you begin to enjoy breathing in and breathing out. Everyone who practices listening to the bell will have that kind of experience. So please, every time you hear the bell, stop whatever you are saying no matter how important it is. Even if you are giving a Dharma Talk. Even if you are telling another person a very important thing. Stop and listen. Listen to yourself, listen to the Buddha within. Listen to God. Listen to Jesus within. Listen to your ancestors calling you. You have been a wanderer for such a long time. You begin to enjoy breathing in and breathing out and go back to your true home.

There is an island, very safe, very green, where you can find lots of beautiful trees and streams of fresh water and birds, you can take refuge in that beautiful island. If you look deeply there must be love at once right there inside of that island. The Buddha land is in there; the kingdom of God is in there; your mother is there; your sister is there; Jesus is there; the Buddha is there. The island is called the Island of Self. The Buddhist expression is Self Island. It is inside you, available. You have been running; you have been searching. You think that your home is out there in space or in time, but in fact, your home is within and you have the capacity of touching it. Learn to listen to the bell. Learn to listen to the telephone, to the clock playing every quarter of the hour. In Plum Village, all of us practice listening to the bell, enjoy breathing in, breathing out, and go back to that beautiful island that is within us.

When you are away for several months, you long to go home. You get tired of traveling, especially after the airplane, you have to take the train, and after the train, bus, and sometimes you have to wait in Ste. Foy La Grande for hours. So, in you there is a desire, "Well, in just ten days, I'll be home."

And when you come home, you are so happy: home, sweet home. Yes, there is a kitchen in there, you can do whatever you want. You can cook anything you want. There is a bed, you can lie on it. There is a TV, you can turn it on at any time. But after a few days being at home you get bored, especially the young people, they want to go again. So, what you call home is not true home yet, because if it is true home then you feel completely satisfied, you feel safe, you feel happy, you feel love, you feel embraced. But why do you feel so restless once you are home? Some voice is calling you to leave home again, to go somewhere, and we are looking for our true home. In fact we are looking for our self. We are looking for our true self, and our true self is our true home. So, the verse concerning the bell can be, "Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self."

There are people who prefer true home. To meet the true self is true home. What you call a self may not be a true self. A true self is not like that; is not miserable like that; is not in disorder like that. A true self does not possess worries and war and conflicts like that. A true self must be a true home.

We have the impression that we have lost our true home and that is true. Many poets believe that they have been exiled on earth. They have to undergo that term of exile and suffer quite a lot before they can be brought home again. Poets in the West and poets in the East also, in Asia, they always feel that they are an angel, they are a spirit that has been exiled, and they long for the moment when they can go home.

In fact, each of us has spent time in a place where we felt very safe. No worries at all. All of us have had that experience, to be in a place where there were no worries. You don't have to clean up your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner. You don't have to think about your clothes. Everything is taken care of just like in the kingdom of God. God has taken care of everything. You do not have to worry about anything. You long to go back to that space, because you have had that experience, and that experience you can touch.

The palace where you stay during that time, in Chinese they call it the palace of the child. You have been that child, in the womb of your mother. You have spent nine months in that palace and totally safe. You did not have to worry about your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner. You didn't have to worry about the

heating system. Your mother drank for you, ate for you, breathed for you, did everything for you. And that is why that experience is still alive. You long to go back to that state of no worries. You don't have to think. How wonderful. And that is why in every one of us there is feeling that I have been there, and I have lost it. Now I suffer so much and I want to go back to it. But it is impossible for us to go back to the womb of our mother. Shall we be in exile forever? Is there any hope that we can go back to that state of safety and comfort and no worries, no fear? The answer is yes!

Your true home is always there. If you know how to handle the monkey within yourself, how to stop running. Each of us is like a hungry ghost. We are hungry for love, we are hungry for understanding. We are hungry for stability, for freedom, and that is why we have been running all the time. We have not had a chance to stop and rest. That is why the practice of meditation is first of all the practice of stopping and resting in order to go back to your true home. That is the real meaning of *samatha*. Samatha means stopping, calming.

Sam has the meaning of lulling, it is like a lullaby, to take care of it like a baby; to calm it down; to stop its crying; to make it feel peaceful. Samatha is like that, because there is a child in us always suffering, always agitated. That is the other aspect of the monkey, always agitating, always suffering, always crying, and samatha is the practice to stop, to calm and to embrace.

There is a child that suffers in us. There is a monkey who is restless in us. But we need someone to take care of the child, to take care of the monkey, to embrace them. We have to provide that person that will do the work. We cannot let the monkey be alone. We cannot let the hungry ghost in us, the hungry child, the suffering child in us, to be alone. We have to come home and take care and embrace. That is the practice of samatha.

The Chinese *ti* means to stop, to stop the suffering, to stop the agitation. You can bring a lot of peace, of comfort, through the practice of samatha. When you are calm, when you are comforted, then you can practice the other part of meditation, which is *vipasyana*. It means looking deeply. Looking deeply in order to understand. When you are concentrated, you are calm, you are in a position to look and to see, that kind of vision will have the power to liberated you from the rest of the suffering in you. These are two elements of Buddhist meditation. When you come to Plum Village, your purpose is not to learn Buddhist philosophy or Pali or Sanskrit or Tibetan or Vietnamese. Your purpose in coming to Plum Village is to learn how to embrace the suffering child within you, the hungry ghost within, the turbulent monkey within. That's samatha.

So learn the practice. There are many forms of practice that can help you to do this. And after you have held it in your loving arms, you'll be able to look deeply and to get the kind of wisdom, to get the kind of understanding that will liberate you. Liberation in Buddhism is liberation by insight, not by grace. That insight would not be possible without the practice of looking meditation. *Dyana*, meditation, has two components: embracing, calming and then looking deeply into the nature of what is. And these are two elements of transformation and healing.

[Bell]

I am home. I wish that you are also. We need some kind of energy to do the work of calming and embracing. The monkey is there, turbulent. The child is there, suffering. We need someone who will do the work of calming, stopping and that is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy that has the power of calming, stopping and healing, and by practicing walking meditation, breathing mindfully, eating mindfully, doing things mindfully, then we can generate that energy to embrace. That energy is considered to be the substance of a Buddha. I would call it the holy spirit.

Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is there in the present moment. When I drink some water, I can drink mindfully or I can drink while thinking of other things. When I drink my water mindfully I am real. I am myself, body and mind together, 100 percent. Because I am there 100 percent of myself the water reveals herself to me 100 percent also. So both me and the water are real and in that moment of water drinking life is real. By drinking my water in mindfulness, I am going home. In that home I touch myself and I touch the water I drink. It's not abstract. In our daily life we eat, we drink, we shake hands, but we are not really there. We are lost in the past, in the future, lost in our worries, our fear. We are not really there. Everything is superficial, everything is like a ghost. To practice mindfulness is to produce your true presence. Your true presence means the presence of you body and your mind together in the here and the now. You can train yourself by drinking your water. Drink your water in such a way that you become real--100 percent.

One day my teacher said, "My child, would you go and get me a bamboo stick." I was very eager to satisfy the request of my teacher so I went out and I didn't close the door mindfully behind me. You love your teacher. You want to love. But you don't know how to love. You are very eager to help him, to serve him. My teacher called me back. "Novice." I came and I joined my hands. "You did not close the door behind you mindfully. Please do it again." So I got the teaching, so I took time, became myself, pulled myself together and made mindful steps in

the direction of the door. Holding the knob, I breathe in, I open it, I step out mindfully, I close it, I breathe out mindfully, and from the door to the place where I find the bamboo stick I continue to practice walking meditation. I have learned how to love my teacher. To love a teacher means to be what the teacher would like to be. A teacher by yourself. My teacher did not have to teach me a second time. I always know how to close the door properly.

In 1966, going to America to plead for a stop of the bombing, I visited American Trappist monk Thomas Merton. I spent one day, one night with him. I was scheduled to give the monks a talk. But I lost my voice, because the speaking tour was very hectic, and I had to work too hard. So I only had time with Thomas. Instead of me giving the talk he gave the talk for me. I just sat and listened. He said, “Dear brothers, when I saw Thich Nhat Hahn closing the door I knew he was a real monk. A monk can understand a monk.” And someone in Germany, very deep in her Catholic tradition, she managed to hear that talk. She wanted to come to Plum Village in order to see how Thich Nhat Hahn closed a door. She came last winter, during a retreat and she stayed for nearly one month, and she observed. She observed the monks, the nuns, and she observed me. I did not know she was trying to observe how we close our doors. In the last day of her stay, we had a formal lunch here in this Still Water Hall and she said some special words to say goodbye. She told us the story of why she had come to Plum Village. She stayed in the New Hamlet, she enjoyed it a lot.

So when you come to Plum Village, please do learn how to close the door properly. How to drink your water properly. How to walk properly from your tent to the kitchen, from the toilet to the meditation hall. Never go without mindfulness. That is the training here. Don't make any step without mindfulness, breathing in and make one, or two or three steps, like you want, and breathing out you do the same. Breathing in you make one step, two step. In the beginning you look like you pretend to be peaceful, to be relaxed, because the monkey in you is pushing you. It pushes even during the night. But you know, to tame the monkey, to tame the horse, to tame the wild elephant, it what the Buddha taught us to do. A mind that is not tamed creates a lot of suffering. A mind that has been tamed can bring a lot of happiness.

So practice walking in such a way that you can arrive in every step. Breathing in, breathing in, breathing out, breathing out. You walk like you walk in the Kingdom of God. Right here, right now, don't wait until you die. In America one time I give a talk in a big church and I said "You don't need to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact you have to be very alive in order to do so. Breathe in, become mindful, become truly alive, and you make one step, only one step can bring you into the Kingdom of God, right here, right now." That's what

we should do while we are in Plum Village. Every time you make a step, please make it mindfully, so that the land you tread will be the Kingdom of God, will be the Pure Land. It is the land of hell, or the land of God. It depends on your way of walk, not on the geological conditions. You have heard that the Kingdom of God is in you. You have heard that the Buddha land is in you. Touch it, make it real, walk in such a way that solidity and peace and non-fear can be possible.

Train yourself. I myself, monks, nuns and permanent residents in Plum Village, we practice walking meditation all year round. Not only during retreats, all year round. With retreat or without retreat. We make a place into our true home. We learn to stop. I will offer you a short gatha for your practice of walking and sitting. When you breathe in, you pay attention to your in-breath that is all. That is not a thought there is no thinking. Pay attention to your in-breath--that is called the practice of mindfulness of breathing. Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. It is like, drinking water; I know that I am drinking water. Mindfulness: conscious of what is going on, in the present moment. And when you breathe in, you enjoy your in-breath, because it is enjoyable, your in-breath. It is enjoyable, breathing in. Remember there was a time when your nose was stuffed, and you could not breath in and out. Remember the asthma crisis. Remember when you were locked in a room where there was no fresh air.

You want to breathe freely, the wonderful fresh air, clean air. This is available in Plum Village. You have a nose that is not stuffed. You have lungs that can pump the air. All conditions are sufficient for you to enjoy your breathing. One day you lie down on your bed, and you can no longer breathe, and no matter what people do to you, you cannot breathe again. So breathe in and feel that you are alive. It is a wonderful thing. You don't need to be trained for ten years in order to breathe in, you can succeed today. In breathing in enjoy the fact that you are breathing in. Wonderful. Mindful breathing. You may use a few words to guide you: "I have arrived." Arrived where? At least I arrive to myself; I am going back to myself, because I am restoring myself, body and mind together. In our daily life our mind and our body are seldom together. That is the state of distraction. Our body is here, but our mind is elsewhere. Caught in the past, caught in the future, caught in our worries, our anger. Therefore, the practice of breathing in is to bring mind and body together. Suddenly you have home to go back to. You can produce your true presence. I have arrived. And when you breathe out, you say "I am home". In French you say "Je suis chez moi, je suis arrive".

Your home is in the here and the now, because life is in the here and the now. This is a very important teaching of the Buddha that many people neglect. In a sutra the Buddha said "Don't cling to the past, the past is no longer there. Do not get upset about the future, the future is not yet there. Only the present moment is

available, and the wise person lives mindfully and happily in the present moment." That is a text teaching us how to live deeply each moment of our daily life. According to the teaching, life is available only in the present. Your appointment with live is in the present moment. If you get lost in the past and the future and miss the present moment, it means you miss your appointment with life. What a pity. We miss our appointment with life so many times a day. We are not truly there. We sit there, yes, but our child comes and she does not find us. Our body is there but are absorbed in our thinking and worries and projects. Our child is disappointed. We are not really there for him, for her.

[Bell]

To love means to be there for the person you love. The most precious gift you can make to the beloved one is you presence. So you need to breathe in and breathe out and there you are in the present moment. Your home is available only in the present moment. Breathe in and breathe out, bring your mind back to your body, smile. There you are home, your home in the present moment. Everything you are looking for is in the present moment, including God, including the Pure Land, including the Buddha. The blue sky, life, especially life, can only be touched in the present moment. When could life be touch? Where else? Only the present moment. So the practice here in Plum Village is to go back to the present moment, every time, and to go back by the techniques of walking and breathing. Always go back to the here and the now, because it is the only place where you can find your home, your address. Your true address is: body, mind, united here and now. You don't need any zip code.

It is also the address of God. It is the address of Kingdom of God, it is the address of our ancestors, all our beloved ones are there. The address of love. The address of compassion. The address of freedom, also. It is written the same: body and mind united, here and now. You go back to it every time. By the techniques of breathing and walking. I have arrived I am home. Suddenly you don't feel the need to run. You have run for many lifetimes. Because you don't know that your true life, your true home is in the here and the now.

You think you cannot be happy in the here and the now. That is why you continue to run. Somehow you think that happiness in not possible in the here and the now. You still need more conditions. You think that in the future, maybe, you can find them. That is why you continue to run. But if you go home, you'll find that you have more than enough conditions to be happy. You can be happy right now, right here. Remember the teachings of the Buddha: “It is possible to live happily in the present moment.” You may say, “But how can I be happy when I have lots of pain, worries in me?’ The Buddha said "yes, it's possible to

be happy with some pain and sorrow and worry in you." The garden may have some garbage within, but that does not prevent the flowers from blooming. If you know how to make compost, you cherish this garbage, because without the garbage you have nothing with which to make compost to nourish the flowers. The Buddha would smile, "My dear ones, you need some suffering, you need some garbage in order to help the flowers in your garden to bloom." So let us not be too worried about the pain, the sorrow, the difficulties in us. It is still possible to live happily with some suffering, some pain, in us.

You know a boat. When you throw a rock into the river it will sink to the bottom of the river. No rock can float on the surface of the water like a flower. But if you have a boat, you can put kilograms of rocks in it and the boat will still float. So with this amount of suffering in you, if you manage to have a boat, then you can still float. You can enjoy your rowing back and forth across the lake or the river. Learn the art of generating the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the boat that can embrace, that can transport, that can transform. You know you can do it.

Don't lose any minute of your day. Each minute of your day is to generate the energy of mindfulness: walking, breathing, sitting. You breathe in, you enjoy your breathing and you say, "I have arrived." The purpose is to stop running. When you breathe out you say, "I am home." Your home begins to reveal itself. If you are a beginner, you have not explored entirely your true home yet. But at least you already have access. You touch it and the more you touch it, the more your true home will reveal itself to you. You don't have to take a long time. The moment when you know how to breathe in, some peace, some joy, some stability is already born in you. That is the characteristic of the dharma. It does not need a lot of time. You can see the effect of the practice right now, right here.

Breathe in, allow yourself breathe in naturally. Don't try to struggle in order to breathe in. Why do you have to struggle breathing in? If you struggle like that after a few minutes of breathing in and out you will be exhausted. So learn how to breathe. Allow yourself to breathe in and out naturally. Don't try to make it longer or deeper. Just breathe normally, like when you sit in you living room, or when you enjoy your garden behind the house. Only turn on the energy of mindfulness, and become aware of you in breath and out breath. If it is short, you know that this is a short breath. If it is long, then you know this is a long breath. That's all. To recognize your breathing as it. Don't interfere, don't try to bend, to correct, to do anything, leave it alone. Only observe it. In our daily life, we breathe but we don't breathe mindfully. In our practice we continue to breathe but we learn to breathe mindfully. No effort should be made in the breathing. There should be only the practice of being aware of your breathing.

When you breathe in you may feel more peaceful. Especially when you come to the second or third breath. Naturally, if you breathe mindfully for three of four times, the quality of your breathing will be improved, without your effort to improve it at all. Those of us who have practiced, we know about this. So, I have arrived, I am home. You sit on your cushion practicing sitting meditation, you may enjoy just this: “I have arrived, I am home.” There is no need for me to run anymore. You can feel the effects of stopping in you. If you feel that the restlessness in you is diminished and you enjoy doing nothing, just sitting and breathing, you have made progress. A few minutes later you must shift into the second line of the poem: “In the here and the now.” In fact, this second line is exactly the same as the first one. It means the same thing. “Where do I arrive?” I arrive in the here. Where is my home, my home is in the now. Because life is in that moment. The beautiful sunset, the beautiful vegetation, the full moon, the person you love, the fresh air, the plum. Everything has to be touched in the present moment. If you are not in the present moment, these things are not for you.

Suppose you are standing with ten people, looking in the direction of the sunset. The sunset is beautiful. Many people enjoy the sunset. How colorful, how glorious the sunset is. But you don't see the beautiful sunset, because you stand there with other people, but you are absorbed in you worries. Your mind is thinking of tomorrow after tomorrow, or the past. So the sunset is not for you. The sunset is for those who are present in the here and the now. The condition, the basic condition to enjoy the sunset, is to be there, body and mind united, and that condition can be fulfilled by just one mindful in breath and out breath. Do you have to make any special effort to enjoy a beautiful sunset? Not at all. Just be there. When you breathe in and breathe out mindfully, all the thinking, all the worries are eliminated. Your true presence is needed for the sunset to reveal herself.

So in the here and the now is our true home. You might enjoy: “Breathing in I feel I have established myself in the here, breathing out I dwell solidly in the now.” You are touching life in the present moment. That is the purpose of your sitting meditation. Don't try to become a Buddha; don't try to become something else, someone else. Be yourself, totally alive on your cushion. Do not think, because breathing in, breathing out is not that hard. The practice is not to be lost in your thinking. “I think therefore I am not.” To be and not to think. To think is not to be. To be means to be something. To be your true home, or to be your worries, your running, your sorrow. And to be your true home, this is not thinking.

“I am solid, I am free.” Solidity is the basic condition for happiness. Solidity, stability, that is what we have to cultivate. In a sitting position, you cultivate the solidity of your body position. The lotus and half lotus position are the best, otherwise, you will have to look for the chrysanthemum position. The chrysanthemum position is whatever position that you are most comfortable in, and you may have to look for a cushion or two; you have to find out your chrysanthemum position. That is an alternative to your lotus or half lotus. You may spend one or two hours with every kind of cushion until you find it. When you find it, you can be comfortable for half an hour of sitting.

Solidity of the body and sitting still is one of the ways of cultivating the stability of the body. When you have stability of the body, the stability of the mind will increase, and vice versa. If you have stability of the mind, you can sit very still; and if you can sit very still, you will be able to be more peaceful and solid in your mind. So the two things help each other.

"I am free." Free from what? This is not political freedom. This is free from worries, from attachment to the past, from worries about the future. We are assailed by many thoughts, by many worries, by many kinds of anxiety and fear. We are not free and that is why we are not happy. When you have come back to yourself, you will touch so many of the conditions that can make you happy. You will that it is possible to be happy right here and right now, in the sitting position, in the walking meditation, while making my breakfast, while cooking for the community, while washing the dishes, while washing my clothes. I can be happy washing my clothes. You see, when you do your dishes, you might like to do it quickly so that you can sit down and enjoy your coffee, so the time of washing dishes is lost. You have to learn how to enjoy dish washing.

When I was a novice, I had to wash dishes for one hundred monks. I did not have hot water, soap. I had to boil the water. I had to use ash and coconut skin, and together with the other novice we had a good time washing dishes, because we had learned the art of mindful dish washing. When I came to the West, I wrote a book to tell people how to enjoy washing the dishes. Some of you may have read it; it is *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. You have to be alive and joyful and happy when you wash your dishes.

You have to make life possible, worth living, during the time of dish washing, otherwise, when you sit down for tea and coffee, you will not be able to enjoy your tea and your coffee. You will think of anything else. You put your coffee down and go and look for the telephone book for some telephone number and call and leave your coffee cold. You know about this. So we can never be happy. We postpone happiness until later on. Never. So the principle is: how to be

happy right now. If someone asked you, "Has the most wonderful moment of your life arrived yet? The best moment of your life, has it arrived yet." You may be embarrassed. You may say, "It seems that that wonderful moment of my life has not arrived yet, but I believe strongly that it will arrive soon, sometime in the future." We want to cling to that belief. We want to be happy some time. It is absurd that we would be unhappy for all of our life. We all believe like that. And you know very well that if you continue to life in forgetfulness, like you have lived the past 20 years or 30 years, and then that wonderful moment will not happen within the next 20 or 30 years, or ever. So the teaching of the Buddha is clear. Don't wait; make the present moment into the most wonderful moment of your life. That is possible, with the energy of mindfulness. Breathing in, dish washing is wonderful. Because I am alive, my eyes are in good condition, my feet are strong, I have a roof to live under. There are so many conditions of happiness available to you now.

Go home and you will see. Go home and you will know that you are lucky, that living happily in the present moment is possible. That is the only way to help you to stop otherwise you continue to run. Stopping is the basic condition of happiness. Solidity and freedom are described as the two basic characteristics of nirvana. When you are solid, when you are free, afflictions can no longer bother you, non-fear is in you, and you enjoy every moment in your daily life. These two kinds of energy, solidity and freedom, have to be cultivated. Your practice of breathing and walking, of doing everything in mindfulness, to go back to the present moment and to establish yourself in the present moment, is the practice of cultivating solidity, stability and freedom. You know, people who are not solid, people who are not free, they suffer a lot. Free from anger, free from illusion, free from misunderstanding, free from despair. That kind of freedom is the base for our happiness.

So, you are touching nirvana, you are touching your home, you are touching the Kingdom of God, while practicing. You don't mention your true home, your don't mention the kingdom of God, you don't mention nirvana, but you are touching nirvana with your body, with your feelings. The Buddha said, "You can touch nirvana with your body, in the here, in the now." If I translate into the language of Christianity, you can enter the Kingdom of God, right here, right now. God is available to you 24 hours a day. “God is your happiness.” There is a French writer who wrote these lines. His name is Andre Gide.

"In the ultimate, I dwell." The ultimate is your true home, where there is no birth, no death; no being, no nonbeing; no up, no down. You are totally safe, no fear at all. And this is available to you in the here and the now. Am I too optimistic?

Look at these waves on the ocean. [Thay draws on chalk board.] Wave Number One, Wave Number Two, Number Three, Number Four, etc. To live the life of a wave is very hard. Each of us is a wave. There is a certain moment when you believe that you were born, and there must be a moment when you will die and will no longer be there, right? These are the things that continued to assail us every day. "I did not exist before that. I will vanish completely after that point. I am. Before that, I was not and after this, I will not be." These ideas, you are not free from them, and they create your fear and your whole block of fear in here, and you become a philosopher.

Second question, "What can I do to be like the other waves?" He is so superb. He is admired by so many other waves. Why God has created me as a small wave and he a big one? So jealousy, discrimination, are born here and you want to become a revolutionary. You want to make everything equal. So, the ideal of high and low, more or less beautiful, all these things continue to assail you as you continue to live the life of the wave. You are not solid; you are not free. But there is another dimension of you that you have not touched. You have touched the dimension of waves. It is called a historical dimension, where there is birth, death; up, down, being and nonbeing, but you have not touched the other dimension that I mentioned, the dimension of the water. So you go down to yourself. You get back to yourself, to your true home, as a way of your looking for your true home. You want to arrive, but you never arrive. Your true home is right there, into you, the water.

It is possible for a wave to live the life of a wave and to live the life of water at the same time. That is our practice. We have to live our ultimate dimension right here and right now. And it is by going back to the here and the now that we can touch the ultimate dimension, our ultimate dimension. Looking from the phenomenal aspect, you see a wave, and each wave is different from all the other waves. There is a self there is non-self. But when you get down to your true home, water, you are no longer afraid. As water, I can never die. There is no high, no low; no more beautiful, no less beautiful. How wonderful. Water is the true nature of waves, and at the time you realize that you are water, you become solid. You become free. No ideas, no fear, no craving can assail you anymore.

In fact, water is available to the wave 24 hours a day. The ultimate, God, is available to you, nirvana, the world of no birth and no death is available to you in the here and the now. You have to trust. You have to surrender to the ultimate reality. God is your true happiness. Enjoy God 24 hours a day. What you are looking for, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land, the true home is in here, if you know how to breathe in and go back to the here and the now. If you train yourself to be solid, to touch deeply life in the present moment, you touch the

ultimate reality, also. You are cultivating the Kingdom of God; you are cultivating your solidity and freedom. The ultimate is made of solidity and freedom. As I said, nirvana is made of solidity and freedom. If you have these two elements, you won't suffer any more. Birth is okay; death is okay; small is okay; big is okay. No longer any discrimination, because you dwell in the ultimate.

I have made this gata for my own practice more than a decade ago and I find if very helpful, very, very effective. Shall we sing together in English?

I have arrived I am home,
In the here and in the now.
I have arrived I am home,
In the here and in the now.

I am solid. I am free.
I am solid. I am free.
In the ultimate I dwell.
In the ultimate I dwell.

[Thay leads Sangha in singing French language version of the gatha.]

This gatha is also available for your walking meditation. You pick up one of the five exercises and when you practice, you breathe in and you make two steps or three steps. In the meditation hall, we make only one step, because we can afford to do so, but outside it would look more natural if you walk a little bit quicker. When you have mastered the walk, you can run mindfully, also. But you can only run mindfully if you already know how to walk mindfully.

So breathing in, you can make, say, two steps. It is good for beginners. "I have arrived, arrived." When you breath out, say, "I am home. I am home." And do it again. And don't just say the word. Live it. When you pronounce the words, "I have arrived," you have to arrive. You have to stop running: running within; running without. You don't run anymore as you walk slowly, yes, but who knows that you have stopped inside? So, you have to stop running. You have to arrive. And, you have to train yourself. We are all here, around you to support you, because we all doing the same. If you lose your step and you get lost, and the monkey takes the lead. Then you see us and you go back and you embrace your monkey again. And say, "Dear monkey let us walk together."

You know, in Plum Village, all of us have signed a treaty with the stairs. Many of us live in buildings with stairs, and we always practice climbing up the stairs in

mindfulness, enjoying every step going down. I have stairs in my hermitage. I have practiced going up and coming down the stairs for twenty years. Never, never, have I betrayed my commitment. So, you may like to sign a treaty with your stairs.

When you begin to take the first step, you can breathe in and out in such a way that peace and joy is possible. Life is possible and the stopping is possible. Be determined to do so. When you are a beginner, the habit energy is very strong. The horse is to be tamed. The elephant has to be tamed. The monkey has to be embraced. And we are there to support you. If halfway, you realize that you have not been mindful in walking, you stop, go down and you begin again.

The monks and the nuns in Plum Village, all of them have signed the peace treaty, the mindfulness treaty. Those of us who don't live in a place where there are stairs, we sign with a section of the path, from this tree to the that rock in the garden, 50 or 100 meters, according to you. Any time you pass that path, you have to walk mindfully each step and if halfway, you get lost, go back. You don't need to hurry to go to the meditation hall, because you are meditating right here, right now. So don't run to the meditation hall.

We have climbed the mountain where the Buddha lived. We have climbed the mountain in Wu Tai Shan, and we received a lot of pleasure climbing these mountains. They are sacred. But everywhere we go offering retreats; we walk in the same way. Everywhere is the Gridhrakuta Mountain. Everywhere is the Wu Tai Shan mountain. Everywhere is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is really available if you know how to walk.

One day, climbing into an airplane in Asia in a country of the Third World, I noticed I was climbing on aluminum stairs, not very solid. But I climbed with the same kind of quality of practice. I enjoyed every step. I climbed into the airplane just like I climbed the Gridhrakuta Mountain or walk in the Upper Hamlet. So be determined not to lose any more of your life, of your time. Stop and enjoy every step you make.

The Zen master Lin Chi said, "The miracle is to walk on earth.” Not on water, not on the burning charcoal, but to walk on earth. So please perform the miracle every time you use your feet and you will learn the art of stopping and living deeply each moment of your life. And you walk like that, not only for you, yourself; you walk for all of us. You walk for all our ancestors and our children and their children, also. So, please this morning, my friends, you have learned how to listen to the bell; how to breathe in and out and arrive, and how to enjoy our walking. When you practice for one week, you'll see the difference.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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